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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: OKRUASHVILI FADES FOR NOW, PATARKATSISHVILI  
DISTRACTS

REF: A. TBILISI 2542

[1](#)B. TBILISI 2559

[1](#)C. TBILISI 2558

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Irakli Okruashvili has secluded himself in his Tbilisi apartment following two weeks of ups and downs in his political fortunes. In an October 11 press conference, Okruashvili's Movement for a United Georgia party secretary, MP Koka Guntsadze, announced that the former Defense Minister is quitting politics (ref A). Guntsadze told the press that Okruashvili feels unwell physically and mentally, but that he "has done his job" by galvanizing the opposition. Following Okruashvili's release from jail on October 9, businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili has become more outspoken and is dropping hints he may take a more active role in politics himself. Accused of political intrigue by Saakashvili's National Movement, he was forced out of his position as Chairman of the Georgian National Olympic Committee (GNOC) on October 9. On October 10, he voluntarily resigned as President of the Federation of Georgian Businessmen, as he said, to spare its members the pressure that was levied on the GNOC board. Members of the united opposition (ref B) intend to visit Europe and the U.S. in the coming weeks to rally support for a "democratic alternative to the Saakashvili regime." The daily newspaper 24 Saati editorialized that the unified opposition is destroying the "normal political process." The Conservative Party issued a statement criticizing the nomination of Levan Tarkhnishvili as the new head of the Central Election Commission (CEC). Finally, the radical ideas of a so-called parliamentary republic ("Georgia without a President") and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (ref C) lost traction in the press. End Summary.

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Okruashvili in Seclusion  
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[1](#)2. (U) In a press conference October 11 Irakli Okruashvili's Movement for a United Georgia party secretary, MP Koka Guntsadze, announced that the former Defense Minister is quitting politics. After meeting with Okruashvili privately in his Tbilisi apartment, Guntsadze announced that Okruashvili feels unwell physically and mentally. He concluded that Okruashvili "has done his job" by galvanizing the opposition, and that "we, his friends and partners, want to state that we fully understand him and we have no complaints against him." Guntsadze said that he and the other members of the new party will "continue to fulfill our goals and we will respond to the authorities appropriately on November 2," referring to the protest planned by the united opposition. Okruashvili has not made any public statement or appearance since his release on bail.

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Will Patarkatsishvili Openly Contend for Power?  
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13. (U) After Okruashvili's release, National Movement members attacked businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili from various angles in public and the media. MP Giga Bokeria denounced Patarkatsishvili, based on Okruashvili's statement that he made his false allegations to gain "political dividends" for himself and Patarkatsishvili. Bokeria reminded Patarkatsishvili that the GOG receives frequent requests from Russia for his extradition to Russia. The National Movement chairman, Davit Kirkitadze, circulated political cartoons depicting Patarkatsishvili sheltering opposition politicians.

On October 9, Patarkatsishvili was ousted from his position as Chairman of the GNOC, by a 26 to 3 vote of its board members. In a live interview on pro-government television station, Rustavi-2, Minister of Economic Development Giorgi Arveladze said that the fevered response to Okruashvili's arrest was inspired by Patarkatsishvili, "according to scenarios written somewhere in Moscow." He accused Patarkatsishvili of using his competing Imedi TV to make the public "hopeless" and "hysterical."

14. (U) On October 10 Patarkatsishvili denounced his ouster from the GNOC as contrary to the organization's charter. He said that several board members told him they had been pressured by the National Movement to suspend him. He rejected Bokeria's and Arveladze's claims and said that he has never supported any conspiracy against the government. Despite rumors that he would sell Imedi TV, he said he could never be pressured to sell the company. However, the following day he announced he would resign as President of the Federation of Georgian Businessmen, in order to spare its

TBILISI 00002574 002 OF 003

members the pressure that was levied on the GNOC board.

15. (U) On October 11 Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava suggested that Imedi TV's "independent editorial policy is being put at risk" by its co-owner, Patarkatsishvili. The mayor used mocking word-play on Patarkatsishvili's first name, hinting that the businessman is a "weakling." He also said that Imedi TV operates as the opposition's "headquarters," it "swears at the authorities, and is being used by Patarkatsishvili to create immunity for himself." University students protested in front of Patarkatsishvili's residence, throwing out fake thousand-dollar bills with his picture on them. Despite this, Bokeria denied that the government has plans to arrest or extradite Patarkatsishvili. Patarkatsishvili confirmed that he is not afraid of extradition, because the Georgian constitution prohibits the extradition of Georgian citizens. He departed Georgia for London on October 12, but is expected to return.

16. (C) Comment: Post has heard rumors that President Saakashvili is less inclined to attack Patarkatsishvili than his confidant Bokeria. The attention paid to Patarkatsishvili has distracted nearly all media attention away from Okruashvili. As a businessman and one of the country's largest taxpayers, Patarkatsishvili should share an interest in stability with President Saakashvili. As Patarkatsishvili hints that he may take Okruashvili's place at the head of the opposition to the Saakashvili government, the National Movement is ramping up the rhetoric. End comment.

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Opposition Plans an Appeal to the West  
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17. (U) Leaders of the united opposition intend to visit Europe and the U.S. in the coming weeks to rally support for a "democratic alternative to the Saakashvili regime." Salome Zourabichvili of Georgia's Way will visit Berlin and Paris.

David Usupashvili of the Republican Party and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia of the Freedom Party will visit Brussels and EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana. The Republican's Davit Usupashvili is visiting the U.S. in late October.

18. (U) On October 3, the newspaper 24 Saati editorialized that the unified opposition is destroying the "normal political process." The paper criticized the move, saying that the parties' united front absolves them of their individual responsibility and perpetuates the belief that power cannot change from one party to another by elections in Georgia. The editorial suggested that all of Georgia's parties need to establish platforms that can win them power on their merits, rather than simply opposing every step by the current government. In an interview 24 Saati published on October 12, Usupashvili said that the planned November 2 protest is "not a goal in itself" and could be scrapped if the National Movement engaged in dialogue with the opposition over vital issues. Meanwhile members of the National Council are campaigning in the regions for supporters to participate on November 2.

19. (U) On October 12 the Conservative Party issued a statement criticizing the nomination of Levan Tarkhnishvili as the new head of the Central Election Commission (CEC). The opposition believes he is too close to the National Movement. The media largely ignored ideas for doing away with the Presidency entirely and installing a constitutional monarchy in Georgia during the latter part of the week. A Parliamentary debate on the constitutional monarchy proposal is scheduled to be held on October 25, at the initiative of the New Rightist party. The National Movement repeated that the idea "would be currently inappropriate for Georgia."

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Comment  
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110. (C) As Okruashvili's star waned over the week, Badri Patarkatsishvili began to hint that he may take the government up on its challenge to come out from behind the scenes and take a more open political role in Georgian politics. Patarkatsishvili has the advantage of nearly inexhaustible finances and a guaranteed supportive media outlet in Imedi TV, but he carries serious negative baggage from his days as a minor oligarch in the service of Boris Berezovsky in Russia. The opposition touted their meetings with the EU and U.S. ambassadors (ref B), and want the public to think the U.S. and other western countries support them in their call for regime change. They will want a large turnout for protests on November 2 to convince the public and western

TBILISI 00002574 003 OF 003

observers that they enjoy broad public support, notwithstanding Usupashvili's suggestion that they may be called off if the government opens a dialogue. The clash of two major television stations controlled by opposing political forces will also have an important impact on the course of the political crisis and how it is perceived in Georgia and the West. Patarkatsishvili told an Imedi interviewer that if he goes into politics he will turn the management of the station over to his partner, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. News Corp, he said, will be "above suspicion of interference in Georgian politics."  
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